Nuggets of News

P.O. Box 26
Gold Hill, Ore. 97525
504 First Avenue

December, 1994

Gold Hill Historical Society Museum, located in the Beeman-Martin house at 504 First Ave., Gold Hill, Oregon

CALENDAR TIME

By TED WHARTON

Our 1995 historical calendar is in the process and should be available by December 19th. This year highlights "Transportation" in the early years. Be sure to reserve your copy as it will feature many fine old vehicles and will be a fitting keepsake for the Gold Hill Centennial year.

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ANNUAL CHILDREN'S PARTY

On Wednesday, December 14th, we again opened our museum to the Patrick Elementary School classes who could include a trip to the museum in their busy Christmas preparations. Ted Wharton furnished our two beautiful trees. We rearranged the main museum room to make room for one of the trees in front of the windows facing the street. This tree we decorated only with lights and a few white bows, leaving room for one and all to decorate with gifts of hand made ornaments, etc. The second tree was set up on the back porch (sounds awful, but for those who haven't visited our museum, the "back porch" is actually an enclosed room, built where the back porch originally was). This tree was decorated with ornaments made by the children who attended last year's party. Be sure to visit the museum as part of your Christmas celebration, to see just how beautiful this truly "old fashioned" tree is.

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WINTER HOURS

On Thanksgiving day we changed to winter hours, now being open Friday, Saturday and Sunday, 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM. These hours of operation will remain in effect until Memorial Day when we will again return to the Wednesday through Sunday operation if we have the volunteers to staff the museum. After the Christmas/New Year holiday we have big expectations to catch up on much of the cataloging, changing displays, framing photos, and the ever present need to continue the work which needs to be done on our beautiful old house and grounds. Any volunteers?

Gingerbread dolls recently completed by President, Marge Martin and Vice-president, Clare Moore. They are now for sale in the gift shop.

IN GOLD HILL

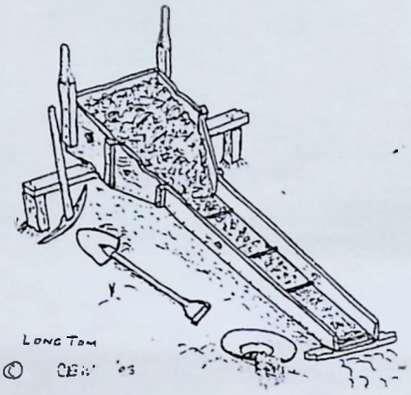
by Charles Benjamin Wharton
December, 1993
©CBW 1993 (text & sketches)
Continued from June, 1994 and September, 1994 Nuggets of News

CHAPTER 5. GOLD (continued...)

Miners turned their attention to other minerals as well, and soon copper and mercury were producing steady incomes. We still turn up an occasional sheet of stationery printed by our father at the Gold Hill News for the Mountain King Quicksilver Mine, which went bankrupt just before they took delivery on their impressively letterheaded bond paper. The mining town of Copper, the boom town for the Blue Ledge mine, now lies at the bottom of the Applegate Reservoir. A note of irony here: In the early days of mining it was not realized that a tightly-bound form of platinum often accompanies copper ore. It may be that a fortune in platinum was passed by, or may still be lying beneath the Applegate waters.

The "hydraulic giant" that we had seen in Sardine Creek in the early '30s was an impressive water cannon that ripped down the bank and washed the gravel through sluice boxes to concentrate the heavy parts, which were then panned to get out gold. It looked as if gravity did most of the work, so Ted and I decided to go into the mining business and get rich. Ted needed a Boy Scout uniform and he realized that getting it by saving Libby labels, even with the help of friends and relations, was going to take a long time. I had no particular goal in mind, but getting rich is a kind of goal in itself.

We got consulting services from Uncle Ivan Smith, Uncle Rob Dusenberry (Aunt Lily's husband), and from a crusty old former miner named Earl, who used to hang around the depot to hop freights to Medford or Roseburg and back. They all agreed that we needed to find a sheet of bedrock in the river having big cracks and holes to catch gravel. They showed us how to make a suction device from a pipe and a broomstick, with a piston seal made from a piece of old rubber boot. The miner sticks the end of the pipe into an underwater crack, pulls on the broomstick and sucks out gravel (hopefully containing gold) into the pipe. The gravel is then emptied into the Long Tom, or if a natural water flow is available, into a sluice box. These devices are wooden troughs about a foot wide, 8 inches deep, and 6 to 10 feet long. There is a metal screen supported about an inch off the bottom to catch the heavy components. The screen mesh get finer as the water washes material along toward the output end. The last few feet is supposed to have a particular kind of screen with twisted mesh. Light materials get flushed away, and with proper operation, only magnetite and flint pebbles, blacksand and gold remain in the final section. The screens are lifted out, and the residue is panned to yield gold. Sometimes fleece was used to catch the fine gold flecks, the "gold dust currency" of mining towns.



We began scouting the Rogue River and small streams in late spring. The water was still high, and we had to guess where bedrock ledges would be. We bushwhacked upstream from the railroad bridge and finally found what appeared to be a perfect place, just downriver from the water intake plant. There was a fenced-in field between our claim and the Sams Valley Road. We staked our claim with a piece of paper sack, and turned our steps toward home. It was after we had crawled between the barbed wire strands and were halfway across the field on the way out that we saw a large Hereford bull, with a determined look in his eye headed rapidly in our direction. There wasn't a lot of time to get to the fence, so we split, and headed for a rocky outcropping that we hoped we could negotiate better than he could. The ploy worked, and apparently he couldn't decide which one to chase, or maybe it just wasn't worth the effort. So he stopped, pawed the ground a few times, and kept an eye on us as we finished crossing to the road. In a way, it was good to have the bull there later, because we supposed it kept claim jumpers away from the mine.

In the prosperous days of the '20s in Gold Hill, a number of new enterprises were spawned. One of them the Highline Ditch,

was intended to take water from the river several miles upstream, and conduct it along a montainside to a level above the town of Gold Hill. The route passed right through the present property of cousin Iris and Toad Kendall. I'm not quite sure what the ultimate use of the water was to be, although I have heard that transporting logs as well as irrigation water were considered. The project got well along before it was abandoned. The ditch grade was surveyed and a 6 foot wide trail was blasted out and graded by horses and skip scrapers. At the point where the ditch was to cross the ridge, apparently the grade had ended up too low, and a thirty-foot trench was gouged across the ridge for a considerable distance, looking for all the world like a Pennsylvania stripmine that didn't strike coal. That seems to be about as far as the project went.

The trench provided the arena for various daredevil sports, and the graded right-of-way, which we called the Highline Trail, served as a kid's highway through the steep, heavily-wooded east slope of "our" mountain. There were blazed trees for secret springs and a grove of sugar maples, and to show where to cut off to get the prize spring wildflowers. We sometimes sold bouquets of lambtongues and red lilies to passing motorists for 15 cents. We added a new blaze to mark the cutoff to get to our mine, with an arrow pointing in the opposite direction to confuse claim jumpers. This ploy probably didn't fool anyone, because after a few days it was pretty apparent which way the foot marks were going: down the mountain, not up. We always checked at the trench to make sure no one was following.

There was a supply of scrap lumber under the house left over from the reconstruction project. Dad had bought the old Bowman house in 1920, and rebuilt it into quite a comfortable modern house over the years. Piles of old siding, windows, and all manner of structural odds and ends were stored there, just waiting to be used. We helped ourselves (with permission, of course), and soon had made the pieces for a Long Tom. These components had to be carried three miles to the mining claim site, to be assembled there. We scrounged screen from various dumps and the cement plant scrap pile.

In June Grandpa and Grandma Starns drove their team and wagon from Grants Pass for a visit, and to plow our garden spot. That was probably the last time they ever made a long trip with their team and wagon, because the next time we visit them only one horse, old Prince, remained. In earlier years Grandpa had made his living driving the Wells Fargo stage, so in a way that trip was the end of an era. During the visit Grandpa castrated the two tomcats, hanging them head-down inside a piece of stovepipe to prevent getting clawed to death. Later he made me a present of the pocket knife he had used, and it served me well for at least thirty years. Not for making castrations, of course. He told us that we really did need that special twisted-mesh screening, and that we could probably find it at the Morrow Hardware store. We eventually did get some by barter (we didn't have any money). Everything was now ready, including an old goldpan that appeared from somewhere.

Almost everything was lugged over the mountain, along the Highline Trail, to avoid being seen by other kids who might follow us to the mine. Anyway, we told ourselves that the road would have been hotter and dustier. We timed our crossing of the pasture to coincide with periods in which the bull was at the other end of the field. After a few visits he lost most of his aggressiveness, but he always eyed us suspiciously, and sometimes even pawed the earth, but without giving chase.

We tried several locations for the Long Tom before finding one that was mostly concealed in willow bushes. This was close enough to the river that lugging water and the gold-bearing gravel was not too big a chore. There was not place that offered a naturally-flowing stream of water, so we had to carry it by bucket and pour it into the hopper at the top. We learned that gravity didn't do all the work.

The river was still cold, so the suction tube was used on the cracks in shallow water first. Even beach sand and dirt were shoveled in sometimes. The box did its job, and we ended up with about a bucket-full of concentrate from each ten buckets full of primary crude. The first few pannings were performed with great expectation, but no colors were found, except for fools gold, about which we had been forewarned. Finally a few flakes of gold appeared, which didn't make much of a showing in the pint jar brought along to carry the treasure home.

Cold and discouraged, we set out for home, but just to have something to show for our efforts, we [illegible] the water intake pond where trout were known to hide, and snagged a nice steelhead to take home. We didn't get caught that [illegible]

later we did, and got a big lecture from the officer. We didn't tell him about the mine, because it probably was on Water Department land.

As the summer progressed, and the river warmed up, we went into the eddy with buckets, shovels and the suction tool in cracks. In the course of a month we had several dollars worth of gold, and as the urgency died off a little, we didn't go as often. But on what turned out to be our last dig, we piled up quite a mound of crude, ready for the next trip. We came back a few days later, to find that the crude and gold pan were missing, and the Long Tom was smashed. We cursed the Water Department officer (wrongly) for wrecking our business. However, a few days later the Cameron kids were showing off a big nugget around town that they had "found down by the river". We accosted them, but they denied any knowledge of our mining claim. That was the end of the mining business.

I went to spend a week or so with Auntie and Uncle Ivan in the old stone house across the river, and I have that visit to thank for learning to swim. Ted had learned to swim earlier from Frank Fink in the irrigation ditch behind Doc. Vroman's house, but I was still scared to let go. It happened this way: After the water flowed out of the flume across Galls Creek there was a quarter mile stretch of fairly quiet flow, in which the depth was about two feet. I was allowed to float boats there, or sticks when there were no boats. I got the idea to ride on a small pine log, and a new sport was born, riding belly down on small logs from the flume to the weir above the neighbor's horse ranch, then running back along the bank for a repeat. On one trip as I was paddling along, it suddenly became clear that the log was no longer beneath, and in fact, I had been swimming for some time. Well, dogpaddling. I was so excited I ran to tell Auntie that I could swim, but as luck would have it, Uncle Ivan was just then returning from milking, and he gave me a lecture for going into the irrigation ditch. I was forbidden to go again. But later he reconsidered, and went with me to check out the safety. Then he even went in with me for a dip, and we had a good time. He taught me the side stroke, and made me practice until he was sure I could do it. That event was a turning point, and everyone breathed easier from then on when I went near the river.

CHAPTER 6. BOAT OR SUBMARINE

Living by a river, and knowing how to swim seem like two things that would be said in the same breath. But it is surprising how many of our friends could not swim, myself included. Buddy Blair claimed he could swim, and he could make it across their swimming pool, but later we found that he wasn't all that good. So when I was finally able to count myself among the select few, I was really thrilled. The next morning I covered the four miles back to Gold Hill in record time, to tell everyone the good news.

No one was home. Mother was working at the del Rio Orchard, Dad was working in Medford, and there was no telling where Ted was. At least Hans the cat was glad to see me. He had recovered from the castration insult and came to rub his chin and shoulder against my pants leg, while emitting a loud purr. His brother Fritz was with Auntie at the stone house across the river, where I had just been visiting. He had finally resigned himself to living there, after an abortive attempt to find his way back; he had been missing for three days, and neighbors had seen him several times down by the river trying to get across.

After the long hike I didn't feel like walking around town, so I coasted in the Bug down our road until the fun was overcome by the chore of dragging it back up the hill. Then the sight of some big, ripe peaches in the tree reminded me that it was lunch time. I was up in the tree looking for some that the birds hadn't pecked when Ted came hiking up the hill. His hands were covered with tar and he had a skinned knee.

As he scrubbed his hands with kerosene, he told about the boat he had started building while I was gone. He had made the ribs and seat with boards from under the house, and had started the hull, using "rescued" laths from the burned Feeny house. He wanted to be able to explore the island, and to have a boat ready for the fall salmon run. Now that I was back and knew how to swim, he said I could become a partner. I don't remember why his knee was skinned, but the tar came from sealing the cracks. He had found a barrel of tar in the alley behind the Blair's house, left over from building the swimming pool. On a hot August day the tar softened enough that it could be scooped into a coffee can, and be smeared into the cracks between laths.

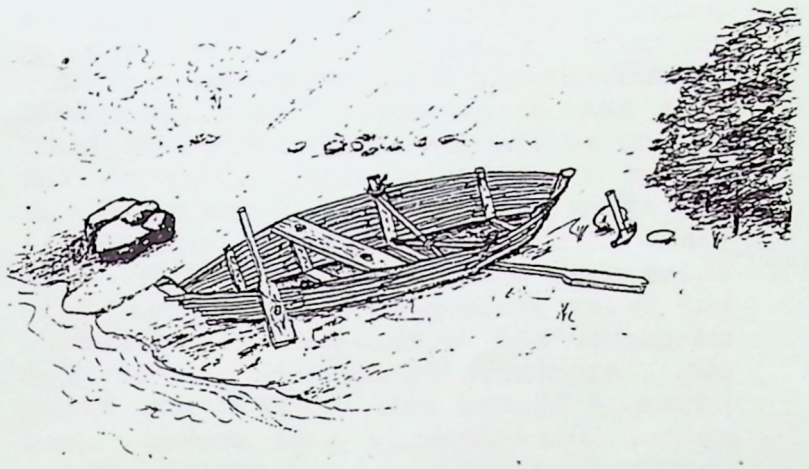
Next day we visited the burned house

and loaded our arms with more boards and laths, and as much sash cord as we could find. We kept looking over our shoulders to see if anyone was coming. Ted led the way about a mile to the highway bridge, jumped over the railing and disappeared into a clump of bushes. That looked kind of risky to me, so after throwing my load over the side, I slid down the bank, thrashed through the sticker-grass, and crawled into the brush. (We were still pulling Gold Hill grass stickers out of our socks for years after we left). At first I couldn't find the boat, but finally, there it was, sitting on the sand, about half finished. Not very pretty, but already looking like a boat.

Ted was starting a fire, and getting ready to "steam" the laths to get them to bend without breaking. There was a big wash tub, salvaged from the river bank, with laths lying across the top, weighted down with rocks to make them bend over the hot water. Off to the side was a pile of broken ones that had not survived the process; they were drying out to become fuel. The steaming process also made it easier to drive nails through without splitting the laths, but even so there were several with split ends. Ted said the nails were too big, and I remembered that Kenny Cook had a bag of shingle nails left over from their roofing job. We were able to trade him something for half of the bag full, but we had to tell him about the boat. He came down to see it once, but then lost interest. Vern Dungey also came to look, but he mostly made fun of its crudeness, and claimed we would never finish it and make it float. That made us all the more determined to do a good job.

If you have ever tried to drive a nail through the end of a dry lath without splitting it, you know our problem. But we finally struck upon a marvelous technique, and our success rate improved dramatically; dip the end into melted tar, then into the river to harden the tar. Shingle nails then went through like magic, and we were able to nail the laths onto the ribs and bend them around to the end posts. Only the seat held the walls from collapsing, and we had to add an X piece, tied together with the sash cord, for additional cross support.

Finally the boat was finished, and we pushed it out into the river. It floated! There was a little list to starboard, but it floated, even with Ted in it. But then the cracks all around the floor boards began gushing water. We dragged it out and poured tar into the cracks, but it wouldn't stick to the wet wood.



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By the next afternoon the sun had dried out the boards enough that the tar would stick, and we used a lot of it, just to be sure. It wasn't until we started to launch it again that we discovered how heavy it was, and at first thought it was the tar. But finally we realized it was because the laths were soaking up water. They were intended for a dry wall, not for the river. So we left it for a while to dry out before the next test. We didn't have paint.

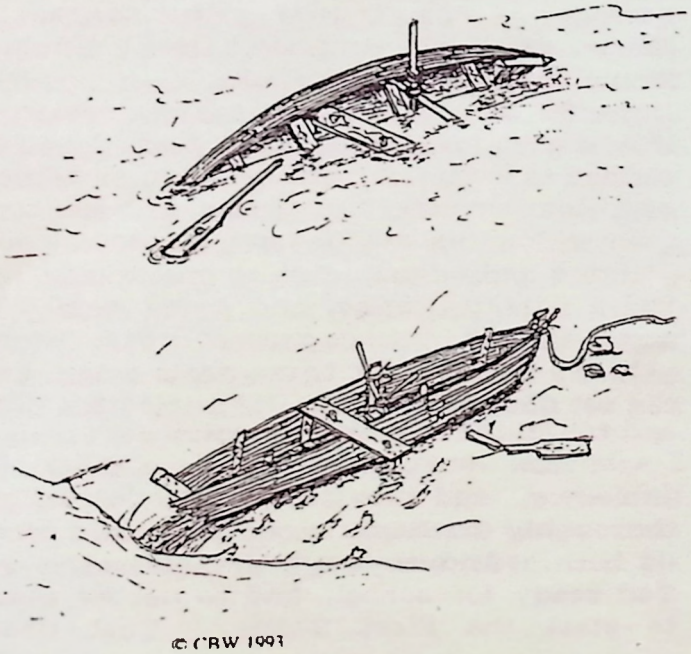
There wasn't enough floatation for both of us at once, and it seemed awfully tippy to me. But Ted had a great time paddling around, and even managed to get a salmon for us. But not in the usual manner, with a hook and line. Near the launching site was a small lagoon, with water about a foot deep. While Ted was paddling in from an excursion, he saw a salmon swimming close to the inlet of the lagoon, and gave chase. As luck wold have it, the fish darted right into the lagoon, and Ted dragged the boat up to block the passage. The frantic salmon thrashed around as we chased it and finally clubbed it into submission with sticks.

So we opened the salmon season a little early. It caused quite a stir, as Ted carried the big fish through town on a stick over his shoulder, with its tail hanging down below his seat. Lots of people were pointing and talking, but no one asked if we had a fishing license, and no on seemed to notice that the salmon season hadn't opened yet. We had fish for three meals a day, and the cat gorged himself. We buried the head and tail in the strawberry patch.

The boat had now earned its existence, and we decided to let it get thoroughly dried out to see if it would carry us both. And anyway, Mother had to get Ted ready for school, and to get me ready to start the First Grade. That meant

getting a pair of shoes. That was always the most dreaded part of the end of summer, having to put on shoes again, kind of a rite of autumn. The blisters that always sprang up on the backs of heels caused at least as much agony as the squeezing of the instep. I was happy one year when we bought some second-hand shoes that were already broken in. Ten was seven years older than I, so his hand-me-downs had all disappeared to cousins, etc. Anyway, for the first day of First Grade, I needed new, stiff, sturdy brown shoes, and scratchy wool socks. And people wondered why I was frowning in the school photo.

Next weekend we launched the boat and gingerly climbed in. There wasn't much free-board, but with great care we were able to paddle out into the current and triumphantly float down behind Coy's gas station. We could see that the water pressure on the sides made them bow in a little, but all was going well until we realized that the ends of the X pieces were slipping through the rope knots, and the bow section was collapsing, right across my lap. We paddled for shore, but suddenly the seat come unnailed from one end, catapulting Ted out into the river. The whole structure folded up like a lady's purse, and capsized on its right side, with me inside, squeezed like in a clam shell. But it didn't sink. Ted helped drag me out of the wreck, while we laughed uproariously. But it was a hollow laugh, because we were pretty disappointed inside. My only injuries were scratches from the nails sticking in from the laths, and some tar on my shirt.



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One paddle got broken, but the structure didn't look very bad, just very narrow. We thought we might be able to spread out the sides again, and brace them better next time. So we pried with sticks and boards, and just as we almost got the seat back in place, the whole stern popped open, as one lath after another came unnailed and split lengthwise. And then it started to rain. We dragged the carcass off into the bushes and trudged home with our tools.

By the time we returned to the boat later in the week someone had finished smashing it up, so we abandoned the project, with mixed feelings: some successes, some failures.

If you yearn to take a boat ride down the Rogue, go to the west end of Gold Hill bridge on a warm summer afternoon. Slide down the bank, and beside a patch of brush, on a sandy beach not far from a silted-in lagoon you will find a thriving business renting out sturdy inflated rubber boats, with unbreakable oars and secure life jackets. If you listen carefully you may still hear the laughter of two small boys relishing the thrill of their first maritime adventure.

To be continued----------

CHRISTMAS POTLUCK

Our December 21st meeting will be our annual Christmas party with hors d'oeuvre and dessert potluck. Please join us for the festivities. 7:00 PM in the museum.

ANNUAL DUES

Many thanks to all of you who sent in your dues early. It will help a lot to cut down on some of the first of the year rush and bookkeeping. Renewal notices will be phoned or mailed in January, or you can use the form at the end of this newsletter. Dues remain $5.00 per family per year. Any contributions are always appreciated, and volunteers are always welcome.

ELECTION

Remember, election of officers takes place at our February, 1995 meeting. Please participate in the government of your society by joining us for that meeting and casting your vote. Nominations take place at the January, 1995 meeting

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MUSEUM HOURS

10:00 AM till 4:00 PM on the following days:

Winter
(Thanksgiving through Memorial Day)
Friday, Saturday and Sunday

Summer
(Memorial Day through Labor Day)
Wednesday through Sunday

Fall
(Labor Day through Thanksgiving)
Thursday through Sunday

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Gold Hill Historical Society
Membership Form

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*Name*_____

*Street Address*_____

*Mailing Address*_____

*City, State, Zip*_____

*Phone*_____

☐ *Family Membership $5.00 Per Year*
☐ *Contribution*
☐ *Yes, I would like to volunteer*

Return To:
Gold Hill Historical Society
P. O. Box 26
Gold Hill, Oregon 97525

MEETINGS

Regular meetings are held the third Wednesday of each month at 7:00 P.M. in the museum, located at 504 First Avenue. Please join us for an evening of fellowship, some say-so in how your society is run, and some great refreshments. Next meetings are:

Wednesday, December 31, 1994, 7:00 PM*
**Hors d'oeuvre & dessert potluck
Wednesday, January 18, 1995, 7:00 PM
Wednesday, February 15, 1995, 7:00 PM
Wednesday, March 15, 1995, 7:00 PM

THANK YOU

Once again, many thanks to our wonderful volunteers who devote so much of their time and effort to make our museum possible. Without you we could not exist.

BEST WISHES

Best wishes to one and all-----
Belated Happy Hanukkah (I did have hopes of having the newsletter out during that week! Goofed again)
Merry Christmas!!
Happy New Year!!
Happy Valentines Day!!
Happy President's Day
(Hopefully the next newsletter will make it before St. Patrick's Day!)

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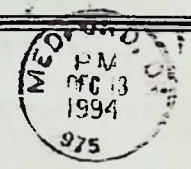
P. O. Box 26
504 First Avenue
Gold Hill, Oregon 97525



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